

VZCZCXRO0296  
PP RUEHBC RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHLB #0358/01 0701230  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 101230Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1252  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2304  
RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000358

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL IS KPAL IE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: ANTI-HIZBALLAH SHIA LEADER SEEKS U.S.  
SUPPORT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

---

¶1. (C) Independent Shia leader Ahmad Assad assessed positively his official reception during a recent Washington visit and is hopeful he will receive USG political and financial support. Assad briefed the Charge on his background and political stand, and deplored the general lack of media attention for non-Hizballah Shia. Assad also expressed keen interest in organizing a MEPI-sponsored Shia conference in Beirut and in having the Charge meet with the anti-Hizballah Shia Mufti of Tyre, Sayyed Ali al-Amin. End summary.

HOPES TO BUILD ON CONTACTS  
MADE IN U.S. VISIT

---

¶2. (C) Assad, who heads the anti-Hizballah Intimaa (Belonging) independent Shia political party, was pleased with the reception he had received during his January visit to Washington, which included meetings with DAPNSA Abrams, OVP Chief of Staff John Hannah, and Representative Gary Ackerman (R-NY). Assad explained that his Washington meetings focused on the need for a proportional representation electoral system in Lebanon in order to break Hizballah's stranglehold on Shia political activities, and the need to improve his somewhat distant relationship with March 14. He claimed that his ties with nearly everyone in March 14 except majority leader Saad Hariri are reasonably good; he believes the Saudis discourage Hariri from dealing with him. Assad also complained that the Saudis had not made up their mind to confront Iran and argued that they should be pressured to do so.

¶3. (C) Assad noted that he planned to return to the U.S. in May with a small delegation of supporters. He also hopes to organize a MEPI-supported Shia conference in Beirut. Assad pointed out that he has a strong support base in south Lebanon, and especially in the area of his family's village, Tayyebeh, on the border with Israel. According to Assad, people are afraid to express negative views about Hizballah and its Shia ally, the Amal party; nevertheless, Assad maintained he is still able to draw crowds of a few thousands at his rallies.

LEBANESE MEDIA SHY AWAY  
FROM NON-HIZBALLAH SHIA

---

¶4. (C) Assad deplored the lack of media attention accorded Shia leaders who disagree with and speak out against Hizballah. As case in point is LBC TV which, Assad said, is afraid to offend Hizballah. Assad requested that the Charge put in a word for him with LBC CEO Pierre Daher to secure him an appearance on LBC's premiere weekly talk show hosted by Marcel Ghanem, Kalam al-Nass. On the other hand, Assad praised moderate, anti-Syrian al-Nahar daily newspaper for always agreeing to publish his statements and Intimaa's press releases.

COMMENT

-----

¶5. (C) We have doubts about al-Assad's influence. Most other anti-Hizballah Shia activists, journalists, and academics we meet say that he has a huge ego and refuses to cooperate or collaborate with any of his anti-Hizballah co-religionists unless he gets to preside over political planning and activities. Although some still invite him to independent Shia roundtables to discuss ways to loosen Hizballah and Amal's grip on the sociopolitical sentiments of the Shia masses, others simply ignore him. Assad is considered autocratic, perhaps a consequence of coming from a feudal landowning family in the south. It is telling that last year when the Embassy suggested including some other anti-Hizballah Shia representatives in a meeting with Assad and official visitors from Washington, he declined, saying that he could speak for all. Embassy continues to invite independent Shia activists and thinkers to meet with us both individually and in group events to exchange views. We will be doing so next on March 13 during an S/P visit to promote better understanding of the U.S.; understand Shia points of view regarding political and socioeconomic issues; and

BEIRUT 00000358 002 OF 002

provide an opportunity for constructive dialogue. End comment.

SISON